

JPL sued over Hodgkin's death

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LA CANADA FLINTRIDGE — A Glendale mother is suing the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, claiming that her adult daughter's cancer death was the result of the NASA

lab's dumping of toxic chemicals in the Arroyo Seco decades ago.

Two of the daughter's former schoolmates — themselves both victims of Hodgkin's disease — are co-plaintiffs in the suit. It alleges their illnesses were caused by the dumping of 23 toxic chemicals near St.

Bede Catholic School, which they attended as children.

On Friday, JPL Deputy Director Larry Dumas questioned whether a link can be shown between the chemicals and the cancers.

"It's one thing to make a claim," he said. "It's another to prove it."

Anita Salvo — whose daughter Francesca died of Hodgkin's disease at age 24 in 1989 — has sued for wrongful death. The plaintiffs suing over their own illnesses are Tamara Vallier, 30, and Ramona Higley, 32, both of Sunland.

Francesca Salvo and Higley

graduated in 1978 from the K-8 parochial school, which is within a mile of JPL. Vallier graduated in 1980.

The plaintiffs' attorney, Thomas Girardi, said it is a "reasonable inference" to draw a link between

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the dumping and the diseases.

He noted 1991 state health statistics show that a woman's chance of developing Hodgkin's disease is only about one in 50,000.

"You have very young people in a very small area who come down with a very rare disease in an age group that is very unlikely," he said. "Then you have an admission by the defendant that they dumped the very chemical that causes this cancer in this area. Pretty soon you have to say, what's going on here?"

JPL spokesman George Alexander said he could not comment at length about the lawsuit, which was filed Jan. 10 in Los Angeles Superior Court.

"We intend to defend ourselves very vigorously," he said.

The suit does not specify a dollar amount for damages sought, but Clifford Pearson, one of Girardi's colleagues, said it could run into the millions of dollars.

JPL has acknowledged using cesspools and dumping pits along the Arroyo Seco to dispose of chemical waste until the early 1960s.

In 1990, JPL agreed to pay more than \$3 million over three years to clean cancer-causing chemicals out of water pumped from four Pasadena city wells south of the lab.

The wells had been closed due to excessive levels of solvents used in industrial metal-cleaning processes.

Anita Salvo said her daughter was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease in 1984. Friday would have been her 32nd birthday.

Salvo called the lawsuit "a lesson to anybody else who dumps their stuff around that may cause harm to children."